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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0825
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RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1928
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2349
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4780
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RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000636

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR S. HILL
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/25/2018
TAGS: ELAB PGOV PREL ASEC PHUM KDEM ZI
SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY SKEPTICAL OF MOU AND TALKS

REF: A. A: HARARE 628
 1B. B: HARARE 625
 1C. C: HARARE 606

Classified By: Ambassador James McGee for reason 1.4(d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) While leaders of Zimbabwe's vibrant civil society welcome political dialogue, they are deeply skeptical about the prospect of a future under a government of national unity (GNU). In recent months, civil society has backed the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) very openly. However, recent criticism of MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai's handshake with Robert Mugabe and the talks in South Africa indicate its continued willingness to exercise independence. A number of civil society organizations have called publicly for a transitional government and a new election rather than a GNU. In private, however, they concede that a transitional government is an elusive dream that ZANU-PF may never accept. Civil society's criticism reflects fears that the MDC is going to sell itself short and may be swallowed by ZANU-PF, eliminating the only strong opposition party in Zimbabwe.
END SUMMARY.

Civil society wants transitional government, not GNU

12. (C) On July 15, civil society organizations met in Harare to discuss their position on the current political situation. In a press conference on July 16, Dr. Lovemore Madhuku, chairman of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), who convened the meeting, called for a transitional government led by a neutral person, and rejected a power-sharing arrangement. His statement was endorsed by a number of leading organizations including Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), and the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR). Some civil society

representatives and journalists privately criticized the press release as not fully representing the consensus of the dozens of civil society organizations present.

Representatives told emboff that the majority of organizations were not satisfied with the document, believing it did not reflect civil society's previous statements that the will of the people was expressed on March 29 and that any new government should reflect this will. They accused three leaders, namely Jenni Williams of WOZA, Takura Zhangazha of MISA, and Munyaradzi Gwisai of the International Socialist Organization in Zimbabwe, of 'hijacking' the statement and changing the language to reflect their thoughts rather than those of the larger group.

¶3. (C) On July 16, WOZA leaders, including Jenni Williams, conceded to poloff that while a transitional authority and a fresh election would be best, it was also highly unlikely. Everyone knews, they said, that Mugabe was not going to hand over the reigns of power and that some kind of government of national unity (GNU) was the most likely and -- regrettably -- the best-case scenario. However, they were skeptical about the MDC entering into any kind of agreement with ZANU-PF, saying it could not be trusted and it had historically swallowed up its opposition. Williams authored an article in a Kenyan newspaper on July 23 criticizing Zimbabwean political leadership's self-importance and ignorance of the people's daily plight and the "crashing economy". She described her vision for a transitional authority for 18 months, with a greater role for the UN in addressing the humanitarian crisis, and called for an

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immediate cessation to the violence, which has not stopped since the June 27 election (reftel C).

Some, but not a lot of optimism for talks

¶4. (U) With the signing of the MOU on July 21 (reftels A and B), civil society leaders have expressed varying degrees of receptiveness to the development. In England, Harare Anglican bishop Sebastian Bakare said that the launch of talks offered "a little" hope, but he indicated it was too early to say if the talks would lead to a real solution. He echoed a familiar concern that the MDC would be swallowed up by ZANU-PF, as had happened in Zimbabwe's past.

¶5. (C) MISA Zimbabwe chairman Loughty Dube said on July 22 that he was "cautiously optimistic". MISA Program Officer Takura Zhangazha further explained to poloff on July 24 that these talks were "inevitable", but he criticized MDC and ZANU-PF for not including civil society in drafting the MOU. Specifically, Zhangazha said that ZANU-PF was specific in its media concerns in adding "external radio stations" to the agenda. Had MDC consulted with MISA, it would have advised MDC to include the issues of the prohibition of foreign journalists, heavily biased public broadcasting, and the recently imposed taxes on foreign-printed papers. He further explained that the secretive negotiation process for the MOU was similar to the negotiation in 2007 that resulted in Constitutional Amendment 18 that called for harmonized elections. Zhangazha described a power-sharing arrangement as a means for ZANU-PF to simply buy time, regain international credibility, and eliminate sanctions. He opined that while some elements of the MDC would be strong in resisting being "swallowed" by ZANU-PF, others would not. He thought that the Mutambara faction could play a critical role in tipping the balance in either direction.

¶6. (C) ZCTU Secretary General Wellington Chibebe issued a press statement "welcoming" the move towards a negotiated settlement but the statement criticized the consultation process as closed and called on the facilitators to open the dialogue to include civil society. In a meeting with poloff on July 22, Chibebe and ZCTU President Lovemore Matombo

expressed less enthusiasm for the talks. Matombo sighed that, as labor leaders, they were in the business of negotiations and you "never" get excited until a deal has been reached, and certainly not over an agenda for talks. They echoed Madhuku's call for a neutral transitional authority to lead the country, but they also conceded that some kind of power-sharing agreement was the most likely outcome. The labor leaders also criticized the negotiation process as being too closed, saying that the political leaders needed civil society's acceptance and participation to make the political agreement work. They repeated MISA's concerns that they had been consulted informally by elements of the MDC, but in a haphazard manner rather than in a strategic, systematic fashion.

¶7. (C) NCA president Dr. Lovemore Madhuku (who is also a constitutional law expert) told poloff on July 25 that he was "not very optimistic". He opined that the talks will collapse unless the MDC agrees to a GNU and that ZANU-PF would never agree to a transitional government. Consequently, the constitutional and legal reforms needed to address the larger issues of poor governance and weak institutions would remain unaddressed. As the economy continues to decline, he thought that people could rise up if the talks collapse and the situation on the ground further deteriorates.

¶8. (U) Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, which represents over HARARE 00000636 003 OF 003

350 civic organizations, published a statement on July 22 calling for a solution that represents the will of the people, as reflected in the March 29 election. Its statement also pointed out the governance issues and erosion of constitutionality and democracy over the last 10 years. The Coalition called for a transitional authority rather than a GNU, saying that a GNU was just a means to give ZANU-PF "breathing space" before re-embarking on a war path against the opposition and pro-democracy movements.

Zimbabweans' skepticism decreasing?

¶9. (U) One of Zimbabwe's most important civil society websites, Kubatana!, requested input by SMS from Zimbabweans regarding the talks. In April they asked about a possible GNU and received overwhelmingly negative feedback. In contrast, respondents now -- likely softened by the violence that wracked the countryside throughout May and June -- indicated that talks were a welcome development, but warned Tsvangirai and MDC to be careful that they did not get "swallowed" by ZANU-PF as happened to then-opposition party ZAPU in 1987. In addition, they received over 300 requests for a copy of the MOU, indicating the lack of information in the public domain regarding even the public aspects of the talks.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) Zimbabwe's vibrant civil society is one of the few remaining causes for optimism in Zimbabwe. These organizations represent tens of thousands of ordinary Zimbabweans and they continue to be outspoken about the political future of their country. It is interesting that while they publicly call for a transitional government, they privately acknowledge it will likely never happen. Their public adherence to a call for a transitional government may further exclude them from the negotiations as their position and that of the MDC diverge. END COMMENT.

MCGEE